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ABSTRACT

This question-and-answer-style document describes the policy and process of implementing and enforcing prerequisite and corequisite courses in California community colleges. Prerequisites are defined as a condition of enrollment that students are required to meet prior to enrollment in particular courses and programs. A prerequisite signifies that the skills or body of prior-knowledge required for a course is essential in ensuring a student's success and possibly safety in a particular course. This document systematically provides answers about when course prerequisites should be required, who should be responsible for ensuring that students in classes have met prerequisites, who should have the power to waive a prerequisite, and what are acceptable grades in a prerequisite class. Colleges can assess which courses should have a prerequisite using historical data on student performance and student completion/non-completion rates. Colleges may use assessment test scores or test score ranges to determine if perquisite courses, particularly in basic skills, are needed. While one successful test score cannot be used as a prerequisite, one or more tests may be considered to assess a student's readiness for a particular course. Finally, the document addresses the implications of prerequisites for academic freedom and inquiry. (AF)

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PREREQUISITES, COREQUISITES, ADVISORIES, AND LIMITATIONS ON ENROLLMENT

Fall 1997

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Chancellor's Office
California Community Colleges
Student Services and Special Programs Division

PREREQUISITES, COREQUISITES, ADVISORIES, AND LIMITATIONS ON ENROLLMENT

Following the adoption of revised Title 5 regulations for matriculation and prerequisites in 1993, it became apparent that many colleges would require and wanted additional technical assistance in the implementation of prerequisite processes and interpretations of Title 5 regulations. To facilitate this technical assistance effort, a "writing group" was formed with representatives of the statewide Academic Senate, the Chancellor's Office matriculation, legal and instructional resources units, and several colleges. This group began work on a questions and answers document intended to address the more frequently-voiced concerns of college instructors, counselors, administrators and staff with respect to the implementation of pre and corequisites, advisories on recommended preparation, and limitations on enrollment. This document continues these efforts.

These questions and answers are concerned with interpretations of Title 5. It is expected that with greater experience with respect to the implementation process, additional questions and answers will be developed and distributed to the colleges in order that technical assistance in this area be maintained.

In a collegial effort to fully inform colleges regarding the development and implementation of prerequisites, corequisites, and advisories on recommended preparation, the state Chancellor's Office and Academic Senate are issuing this and a companion document, "Good Practice for the Implementation of Prerequisites," that will discuss these issues in greater detail.

1. WHAT ARE PREREQUISITES?

Prerequisites are conditions of enrollment that students are required to meet prior to enrollment in particular courses and programs. The assignment of a prerequisite to a course signifies that the courses, skills, or body of knowledge described in the prerequisite are <u>essential</u> to the success of the student in that course and that it is **highly unlikely** that a student who has not met the prerequisite will receive a satisfactory grade in the course (or at least one course in the program) for which the prerequisite has been established.

2. WHEN MUST A COURSE HAVE A PREREQUISITE?

A district governing board is required to establish prerequisites where the district and/or college curriculum committee(s) has determined that a student is highly unlikely to receive a satisfactory grade in a course without knowledge or skills acquired outside the course. Additionally, there are other purposes for which districts may choose to adopt policies for establishing prerequisites. Title 5, Section 55201 states that prerequisites or corequisites may be established only for any of the following purposes:

a) The prerequisite is expressly required or expressly authorized by statute or regulation. It is often the case that accrediting or licensing bodies with oversight responsibilities for particular subject matter curricula in community college courses have specific statutory or regulatory requirements for enrollment in some courses.

b) The prerequisite or corequisite assures that students without specified skills, concepts, or information necessary for success in the "target" course are highly unlikely to receive a satisfactory grade without meeting the prerequisite or corequisite. There are at least two situations in which to apply this principle: One would rest upon the students' communication or computational skills and their application in the course for which the prerequisite is established; and the other would rest upon the students' subject knowledge or mastery derived from previous courses or experiences. Faculty in the discipline under review and the curriculum committee must play major roles in the establishment of pre and corequisites as well as the determination of the factors affecting a student's likelihood of succeeding in a course without the specified pre or corequisite.

c) The prerequisite or corequisite is necessary to protect the health and safety of a student or the health and safety of others. Some courses include forms of student participation that require significant vigilance to assure that no harm comes to the student or others. In many cases, the course design and teaching methodology may successfully address any health and safety issues so that they need not be stated as prerequisites. Sometimes, however, the course design cannot ensure that students will consistently learn safe practices because of time constraints or circumstances that make learning these skill problematic. In this situation, it may be necessary to establish safety demonstration as a precondition of enrollment, consistent with Title 5 Sections 55201 (c) (4) and 58106 (b).

This provision for establishing a link between safety and pre and corequisites should not be used as a means for barring a student from courses because the student's primary language is not English, or because of fears or stereotypes concerning problems that may result from a student's disability. If language is an issue and a college (and district) wishes to establish a communication prerequisite, appropriate data collection and analysis would be necessary in addition to the methods of scrutiny described in Title 5, Section 55201(b)(1), (e), as well as in the Model District Policy.

Additional discussion of the prudent use of health and safety prerequisites occurs in the Academic Senate document, Good Practice for the Implementation of Prerequisites (pps 9-10).

3. DOES ESTABLISHING A PREREQUISITE FOR A COURSE MEAN THAT COLLEGES MUST RESTRICT THE ENROLLMENT IN THE COURSE TO STUDENTS WHO MEET THE PREREQUISITE?

Yes. A course that has a prerequisite signifies that a district has carefully reviewed course content and requirements, entrance and exit skills, and the knowledge necessary for the student to achieve a satisfactory grade in the course for which the prerequisite is obligatory. On the basis of this review, a determination has been made that a student without this prerequisite would not have a high expectation of success in the course. Moreover, the very definition of the term "prerequisite" makes clear that it is a condition of enrollment that a student is required to meet." Consequently, once a prerequisite has been established, it must be uniformly enforced. Students who believe that they are able to meet the prerequisite (or corequisite) in a different manner should be informed of the district's procedures for challenging the prerequisite.

4. SHOULD INSTRUCTORS BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ASSURING THAT STUDENTS IN THEIR COURSES HAVE MET ESTABLISHED PREREQUISITES?

This is not the preferred practice. In the beginning, when the colleges are initializing their enforcement procedures, while it may be necessary to utilize instructors in this manner, the obligation to assure that prerequisites have been met is an institutional one, and individual instructors should not be solely expected to be responsible for this function except, perhaps, on an interim basis while the colleges' computer systems are upgraded to address this responsibility electronically. Additionally, although many colleges have elected to implement automated computer prerequisite checks, it should be kept in mind that while a computer check is surely a comprehensive method for the prerequisite check activity, there is no requirement that colleges must

rely upon computers if they do not choose to do so. Please see the Academic Senate document, Good Practice for the Implementation of Prerequisites (p.19) for another discussion of this subject.

5. THEN WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING PREREQUISITES, ONCE THEY'VE BEEN ESTABLISHED IN ACCORD WITH TITLE 5 AND OUR DISTRICT POLICY?

The intent of establishing prerequisites is to help to assure student success, therefore, all college staff who work directly with students have a responsibility to be knowledgeable on the district's prerequisite policy and its implementation, at least to a degree commensurate with their level of contact with students. This can be made most effective by having prerequisite policies and procedures, descriptions, and definitions written in clear, understandable language and widely distributed to the student body in catalogs, schedules of classes, student handbooks, flyers, signs, etc.

This "whole campus community" approach to prerequisite information should be reinforced by staff and faculty training, so that staff to whom students turn for information on courses (e.g., admissions and registration staff, assessment staff, orientation providers, counselors, instructors, and faculty advisors) can explain the concept of prerequisites and how they are applied at the college, the manner in which challenges may be made, and where students can go for more detailed information. This type of staff training also helps to ensure that information provided to students on prerequisites will be consistent. Consistency in the implementation of prerequisites is crucial if students are to take the need for academic preparation seriously and realize their responsibility to the process and the overall success of the prerequisite process.

6. CAN A STAFF OR FACULTY MEMBER "WAIVE" AN ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENT FOR A STUDENT WHO WISHES TO ENROLL IN A COURSE THAT HAS AN ESTABLISHED PREREQUISITE?

No. Once a prerequisite has been legally established and adopted for a course, all students wishing to enroll in that course must be required to meet the prerequisite, and this requirement must be applied consistently. As mentioned above, Title 5 (Section 55201 [b] [4], [f]) requires colleges to establish procedures by which students may challenge prerequisites and describes the grounds on which such challenges may be based. If the challenge is subsequently upheld, the student will be permitted to enroll in the course.

7. **BUT ISN'T IT TRUE THAT UP TO 20 PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A COURSE WITH A PREREQUISITE CAN BE STUDENTS WHO HAVE NOT MET THE PREREQUISITE?**

No. Title 5, Section 55201 (e) states that if a curriculum committee determines that a ***new*** course needs to have a computation or communication pre or corequisite, then a single period of not more than 2 years may be instituted for gathering the data to conduct the necessary research to establish the pre or corequisite. The purpose of this 2-year provision is to permit the collection of useful data demonstrating the value of the pre or corequisite by fostering comparison outcome data that illustrates the relative success of students who did and did not meet the prerequisite. See the Model District Policy II, A 1, (g)(4) for more information on this topic.

In the Model District Policy, the suggestion is made that a college with such a new course may use the 2 year time period to collect data and ALLOW up to 20 percent of those enrolled in any section of the course, to enroll without having met the prerequisite. This provision may be made only once for a new course and cannot be applied to a course pre or corequisite that was established at a time when it was exempt from review.

Existing Courses

The review of existing courses with prerequisites that were in place before the current regulations were adopted must be undertaken differently than when reviewing new courses. Title 5 Section 55201 (b) (3) requires the examination of all pre and corequisites at least once every six years to assure that "they remain necessary and appropriate." District curriculum committees or faculty in affected disciplines may review their existing prerequisites on a more accelerated schedule if there is concern that students with the prerequisite either do not appear to need the prerequisite, or remain unprepared despite meeting the prerequisite. The review process affords faculty the opportunity to abandon or modify any course entrance requirement that does not remain clearly beneficial and necessary.

8. **DOES A COLLEGE HAVE TWO YEARS TO COLLECT DATA FOR A NEW PREREQUISITE FOR AN ESTABLISHED COURSE, AND CAN STUDENTS BE REQUIRED TO MEET THE NEW PREREQUISITE DURING THIS TIME PERIOD?**

No. Districts and colleges wishing to add a new prerequisite to an existing course do not have a two-year "window of opportunity" for affixing a new condition of enrollment here. The research showing this pre or corequisite to be necessary for student success must be conducted prior to students being expected to meet it. This may be done by using the college's historical data

on student performance and student completion/non-completion of the proposed prerequisite and correlated with student performance and completion/non-completion of the "target" course. These data should be available in the college's database and other student records.

It may be discovered that the new prerequisite can be met by the college's assessment and placement processes. If this appears to be a viable approach, instructional faculty in the discipline(s) should meet with the counseling faculty to identify with them the student attributes and abilities to be used as complementary, appropriate multiple measures in union with an approved testing instrument to determine a student's readiness for entrance into a target course. Additionally, cut scores or ranges would need to be reviewed to ensure that they remain useful in determining skill levels for meeting prerequisites. For a new prerequisite, these may be initially arrived at through a well-documented empirical or judgmental approach by faculty in the discipline as described in Standards, Policies and Procedures for the Evaluation of Assessment Instruments Used in the California Community Colleges.

9. DO COURSES WITHOUT PRE OR COREQUISITES OR ADVISORIES ON RECOMMENDED PREPARATION HAVE TO UNDERGO A CONTENT REVIEW?

No. Title 5 does not require content review for courses without a pre or corequisite, or advisory.

10. WHAT IS A MINIMAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS FOR PERFORMING A CONTENT REVIEW?

The content review process should, at a minimum, be comprised of the following steps:

a) Faculty in the discipline should review the course;
b) The process should be based on the examination of the course outline of record, course syllabi, texts, tests, and other grading criteria;
c) The body of knowledge or skills determined as necessary and appropriate for a student to be successful in the "targeted" course should be documented;
d) A course that develops the substantive skills or body of knowledge required by the target course should be identified, then reviewed for exit knowledge and skills; or an assessment process should be identified that could measure the necessary skills or body of knowledge; and,
e) A systematic matching of the knowledge and skills between those required in the targeted course and those developed or measured by the proposed prerequisite should be documented to determine

whether a rational basis exists for requiring the course or assessment procedure as a prerequisite.

11. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSESSMENT TEST CUT SCORES OR RANGES, AND PREREQUISITES?

Colleges justify their assessment test(s) cut scores or ranges for placement recommendations with data that are collected and analyzed for this purpose. Subsequently, these data are relevant to the continued use of prerequisites for these or subsequent courses in that they indicate students' relative expectancy of success in the course(s) for which the data have been analyzed.

Test instruments' cut scores or ranges, are established on the basis that students who score above the identified cut score have a relatively greater expectancy of success in the course for which the placement is recommended than those who score below it. If the cut score validation does not demonstrate this, then the prerequisite(s) must be set aside until the validation difficulties are identified and resolved. Any prerequisites for that course would have to be removed from subsequent catalogs and schedules and could not be enforced until the problems were resolved.

This action would be necessary because the predictive "power" of the prerequisite's completion would be predicated upon the acquisition of a skill or skill level not substantiated by the data collected and reviewed for this effort. Such prerequisites could be changed to advisories on recommended preparation during this time. The collection of these data must be done according to sound research processes, such as those described in the Model District Policy (section II.A.1.g).

12. CAN AN ASSESSMENT TEST SCORE BE USED AS A PREREQUISITE IF IT IS FROM AN APPROVED TEST AND HAS BEEN LOCALLY VALIDATED FOR PLACEMENT INTO THAT COURSE?

A single test score (or any other single assessment measure) cannot be used as a prerequisite. However, one or more test scores may be used as part of a broader multiple-measures approach for determining a student's readiness for a course. In the event that a college or district chooses to use multiple instrument scores for meeting prerequisites, they must all be assessment instruments on the Chancellor's approved instrument list, and have locally validated cut scores or ranges, and not be highly correlated (i.e., they may not have a correlated value of .75 or higher). Any single test score listed in catalogs, course schedules, or any other college documents as a

prerequisite cannot be enforced and such descriptions need to be removed at the next publishing opportunity.

13. CAN A COLLEGE REQUIRE A GRADE OF "B" OR BETTER AS THE STANDARD FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF A PREREQUISITE COURSE?

Title 5, Section 55758 defines "satisfactory grade" as A, B, C, or CR. Therefore, since "C" is a satisfactory grade, a college should not establish "B" as the lowest grade for determining satisfactory completion of a course serving as a prerequisite. This standard applies to courses that do not function as prerequisites as well. If faculty members suspect that students who receive a "C" are less prepared to do well in a succeeding course, then a solution would appear to be that faculty re-examine the academic rigor and standards of the prerequisite course(s) as well as the exit skills and knowledge they maintain to be necessary to ensure student success in the "target" course(s).

But other considerations are in play here too. Title 5, Section 55761 discusses course repetition and permits students to repeat only courses for which a "substandard" grade of "D," "F," or "NC" has been recorded. Consequently, if the grade of "B" is established as a prerequisite, a student with a "C" could not progress further in the respective course sequence because the "C" grade would not allow repetition of the course, so there would be no way for the student to meet the prerequisite.

14. CAN YOU CLARIFY THE TIMELINES FOR REVIEWING PREREQUISITES AND ESTABLISHING POLICIES FOR THEIR IMPLEMENTATION?

The districts were asked to have Title 5-derived policies and procedures on prerequisites in place by **October 21, 1994**. These were to be submitted to the Chancellor's Office as part of the districts' matriculation plans and included in other appropriate college publications.

All pre and corequisites must be put on a schedule that will assure that they will be reviewed at least once in every six -year cycle, and advisories on some reasonably timely basis. The intent of the review is to ensure that pre and corequisites remain necessary and appropriate to achieve the purpose(s) for which they were established.

While each pre and corequisite must be reviewed, some need to be scrutinized sooner than others. For example, if a pre or corequisite course was established **before** July 6, 1990 and **is part of a sequence of degree-applicable courses within a given discipline,** then this course would not need to be scrutinized before its turn on the six-year review cycle. These are

courses such as Beginning Algebra for Intermediate Algebra, Intermediate Spanish for Advanced Spanish , etc.

In another example, if a pre or corequisite course was established **between** July 6, 1990 and November 4, 1993 and was instituted in conformance with the Title 5 regulations in place at that time (then Section 58106), the course does not need to be scrutinized until its turn on the six-year review cycle. However, if a district has adopted the Model District Policy endorsed by the Chancellor's Office, pre and corequisites of this type are to be reviewed by July 1, 1996, **UNLESS** the college has modified its policy to reflect a different date (up to the six-year maximum).

Pre or corequisite courses established after November 4, 1993 cannot be enforced without first being scrutinized by the college and district.

15. DO THE REVISED TITLE 5 REGULATIONS REQUIRE A LOTTERY?

No. Enrollment in a program or block of courses via a "lottery" is not required by Title 5. But, if you cannot accommodate all the students who meet prerequisites for your program, then you will need to use some nonevaluative student selection technique. A lottery system is one option, but it is certainly not the only one and it may be the least desirable possibility. For example, a simple first-come-first-served system with a waiting list has the virtue of ensuring that students who are not accepted for a particular term are at least given some assurance that, if they meet established prerequisites, they will get in at some known point in the future.

The proper method for assuring that students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a program is to establish pre and corequisites in the manner discussed above. However, it sometimes happens that demand for a program is such that the number of students who meet the prerequisites for the program exceeds the number that can be accommodated in any given semester or quarter. Some colleges have traditionally established elaborate methods of screening applications to determine which students should be allowed to enroll. Frequently, these systems involve assigning points to students on the basis of various criteria such as grade point average, work experience, district residency, letters of recommendation, etc. Title 5, Sections 55201(b)(1,2,3), 58106(a)(b) discuss criteria for prerequisites and enrollment limitations and require colleges to review these criteria and to revise them where necessary.

Those criteria (i.e., GPA, letters of recommendation, work experience, etc.) that involve an assessment of a student's skill level might conceivably be justified as prerequisites if the college can demonstrate that the student who does not meet this standard is highly unlikely to receive a satisfactory grade in the course as per Title 5 Section 55201©(2). If this cannot be shown, or the

district decides not to attempt to establish these criteria as prerequisites, then they may no longer be used. Other criteria that are "non-evaluative" (e.g., district residency, status as a matriculated student, date of application, etc.) can be retained as enrollment limitations. The important point to be distinguished here is that assessing a student's skills is appropriately done with prerequisites (which must be properly justified), whereas managing enrollment should be done through nonevaluative enrollment limitations.

The reason these regulations were adopted was to strengthen academic standards while honoring the philosophical and legal foundations of the "open door" policy and matriculation program which were intended to promote equitable student access and success. Title 5 states that, "...all courses shall be open to enrollment by any student who has been admitted to the college...(Section 58106). Elsewhere, regulations state, "...unless specifically exempted by statute or regulation, every course, course section, or class, reported for state aid, wherever offered and maintained...shall be fully open to enrollment and participation by any person who has been admitted to the college(s) and who meets such prerequisites as may be established..." (Section 51006). Title 5 further requires that fair and equitable procedures be used for determining who may enroll in courses and programs.

16. DOESN'T A TITLE 5 REGULATION REQUIRING INSTRUCTORS TO TEACH IN A PRESCRIBED WAY INTRUDE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM?

The Model District Policy states that a college will establish a procedure that assures that courses for which pre or corequisites have been established are taught in accordance with the course outline of record with emphasis on those aspects of the course outline that serve as the basis for justifying the pre or corequisite. Again, students and programs have the right to anticipate some consistency with respect to course content, expectations and objectives, and standards of grading. Those standards and content should apply to all sections of the same course in the same manner if students' skills are to be commensurate with the requirements of courses for which students' skills and knowledge are necessary for successful entrance and performance.

Conformance to a course outline need not imply an intrusion on the freedom of an instructor to present his/her material in a creative manner. Faculty who teach the affected course(s) must be included in the development and revision of course outlines. And all students who enroll in and successfully complete different sections of prerequisite course "X" should be able to expect to enter "target" course "Y" with sufficient subject knowledge and having attained sufficient skill levels to enable them to succeed in "Y".

17. **HOW DO WE MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE BEST STUDENTS WILL ENROLL IN OUR PROGRAMS IF "EVERYONE" ENROLLED IN THE COLLEGE IS ELIGIBLE AND WE HAVE LIMITED SLOTS FOR ADMISSION?**

Colleges must be explicit about identifying the skills and abilities that students must have to be successful, and establishing the linkages between attaining those skills and enrollment into program courses. This may be done by having curriculum committees and discipline faculty who establish prerequisites and identify entrance and exit skills, and the roles of the counselors and faculty advisors.

As discussed above, it can and often does happen that the number of students who meet all appropriate prerequisites still exceeds the numbers of available slots in a program; however, this does not mean those slots will be "taken up" by students who will drop out of the programs because of their poor academic preparation. If all necessary and appropriate prerequisites have been established and enforced, all students eligible for enrollment will be highly likely to succeed. This would mean that consistent and evenly applied grading criteria and teaching methodologies be used in pre and corequisite courses to truly reflect the skills and abilities that program faculty have researched and determined students need to be successful. If this has been properly done, then using nonevaluative criteria to further limit enrollment is merely a way of fairly and equitably deciding which of the well-qualified students will have the opportunity to enroll in any given term.

Just as importantly, counseling faculty and faculty advisors must be aware of the student attributes (e.g., desire, motivation, study skills) that would help to assure students would be able to succeed and persevere. A true symbiosis of desire and qualification as identified and recognized by faculty and staff is necessary for ensuring student success. If it develops that many students are actually failing or dropping out, then something is seriously wrong. Either additional prerequisites are necessary and should be established, supportive services may not be sufficiently available to mitigate circumstances where students need assistance with circumstances that affect their academic performance (e.g., financial aid, tutoring, child care, etc.) or the matriculation process may not be effectively assisting students to realistically identify attainable goals; or some combination of all these.

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